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Pastora blast seen threat to rebel alliance

By Glenn Garvin
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A mysterious bomb that blew apart a press conference where Nicaraguan rebel leader Eden Pastora was speaking, killing four and injuring dozens of others, might also have exploded any hope for an alliance between the various guerrilla groups battling Nicaragua's leftist government, sources said yesterday.

Before rescue workers could even clear away the rubble of the ramshackle two-story building in La Penca, Nicaragua — a little village just a mile or so from the Costa Rican border — the rumors and speculation about who might want to kill Mr. Pastora were already flying like shrapnel:

The Nicaraguan government? The Costa Rican government? The CIA? Another rebel group? Or even — most chilling to Mr. Pastora — a disgruntled companero from his own guerrilla band?

Whoever set the bomb did not succeed, at least in killing the charismatic Mr. Pastora, perhaps better known as "Commander Zero." He was hospitalized in San Jose, Costa Rica, Wednesday night with wounds in his left leg, the right side of his head and powder burns across his body. Spokesmen at his headquarters said they did not believe any of the wounds was serious.

Not so fortunate was Linda Frazier, an American reporter for a San Jose English-language weekly, who became the 14th foreign journalist to die covering the carnage in Central America. Also killed were a Costa Rican television cameraman, a guerrilla woman, and an unidentified person. At least 28 other reporters and guerrillas were

injured — and more may have died when a boat evacuating some of the wounded across the San Carlos river capsized during a torrential rainstorm.

The bomb went off about 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, just as Mr. Pastora was beginning to take questions from a group of 16 or so reporters ferried in for the occasion. The force of the explosion knocked several of them out of the house and into the nearby river. As the guerrilla leader's soldiers stood, stunned, their rifles slung over their shoulders, the wounded and dying dragged themselves out of the wreckage.

Associated Press reporter Reid G. Miller, his right leg shattered by shrapnel, crawled over to where Mrs. Frazier was lying on the riverbank. "She took my hand and I could see she was talking to me but I could not hear her words," he said from his hospital bed. The explosion had left him temporarily deaf.

Other reporters, stumbling through the rubble, encountered equally grim tableaux. "There were screams of desperation and horror," said UPI correspondent William Céspedes. "It was impossible to get out because of the panic. Pastora's soldiers were shooting their automatic rifles. I came across a TV cameraman with his left leg amputated. There were at least two other dead bodies." One of the most seriously wounded was Roberto "Tito" Chamorro, Mr. Pastora's chief tactician and the man who planned the rebels' successful seizure of a small coastal town last month.

Spokesmen for Mr. Pastora's group — the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance, known by its Spanish acronym of ARDE — insisted no matter how long Mr. Pastora's wounds keep him out of action, it will not affect their guerrilla war in Nicaragua.

"After this, there's all the more

reason to fight the Sandinistas," one ARDE official told The Washington Times from Costa Rica last night.

But ripples of the blast raced quickly through the murky Nicaraguan rebel politics, and age-old suspicions, resentments, and rivalries may turn them into a tidal wave. Mr. Pastora is by far the most charismatic and personally popular leader in any of the various rebel factions — and he also has, by far, the most enemies.

In his strange journey from university student to Sandinista war hero, from professional revolutionary to anti-Sandinista rebel, Mr. Pastora accumulated enemies of every personal and political stripe. Most have sprung up in the wake of his peculiar political odyssey.

His revolutionary activities go back to 1959, when he joined the ragtag band of Sandinista guerrillas who were struggling to topple Nicaraguan strongman Anastasio Somoza. From the very beginning, he specialized in attacks everyone else considered suicidal — his first battle was an assault by 35 guerrillas on army barracks housing 250 troops.

He rose to prominence, and won acknowledgment as a tactical genius, in 1978. With a force of 24 guerrillas, many of them teenagers, he tricked his way into Mr. Somoza's National Palace and seized 1,500 hostages, including most of the Nicaraguan congress and several members of Mr. Somoza's family.

Eventually he exchanged them for 59 "political prisoners" and \$500,000 in cash, and didn't lose a man during the entire operation.

The palace attack not only raised cash for the cause. It also made clear to Nicaraguans of every persuasion the Somoza dynasty was weakening and ready to yield.

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